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ABSTRACT

In order to gather information detailing the extent and effectiveness of oral history projects in public libraries, questionnaires were sent to public libraries in 11 states that listed "oral history" among their resources in the American Library Directory, and to a small number of other libraries in these states with oral history projects that have been mentioned in the literature. A total of 182 questionnaires were sent; of the 111 libraries that replied, 6 reported no oral history resources. Usable replies were received from 105 libraries. Following an introduction and discussion of the methodology, this report examines projects developed in California, Illinois, Indiana, and New York in each of the following time periods: pre-1970, 1970-76, and post-1976. Successful projects are noted for each of these states. Oral history projects in seven other states--Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Florida, Idaho, Alabama, and Georgia--are also described, but in less detail. Finally, comments and advice, conclusions and recommendations, and a bibliography are provided. (THC)

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Oral History in Public Libraries

by

Joseph W. Palmer

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INTRODUCTION

Oral history as a technique was developed by Allan Nevins at Columbia University in the 1940s. It proliferated in the sixties and seventies, fostered by the nation's Bicentennial celebration and the success of *Roots*. Oral history can preserve a segment of a community's heritage that would otherwise surely be lost and can strengthen a community's sense of identity and pride.

Oral history has been extensively described in the literature of librarianship. For years, articles and books have been explaining and extolling it. That many libraries have responded to the attraction of oral history is apparent from the hundreds which list "oral history" among their holdings in the *American Library Directory* and from announcements of projects which have appeared in journals and newsletters.

Many publications offer excellent guidelines for the conduct of oral history projects and warn of pitfalls to avoid, but whether public library projects have actually conformed to these guidelines has never been investigated. Indeed, conspicuously missing from the literature is any attempt to systematically investigate library projects. How extensive, effective or worthwhile have typical projects been? How have they been conducted? Have their products been used? What roles have public librarians played? Do librarians feel their projects have been successful? Do librarians believe the projects were worth the investment of time and effort? Which factors have contributed to the success of projects? Which factors have hindered success?

In an attempt to gather information that could help answer these questions, the present study was undertaken. The ultimate goal was to assist librarians in making informed decisions about oral history and to help them plan projects with the greatest potential for success and utility.

METHODOLOGY

In the summer of 1982, questionnaires were sent to public libraries in 11 states that listed "oral history" among their resources in the *American Library Directory* and to a small number of other libraries in these states with oral history projects that had been mentioned in the literature.

A total of 182 questionnaires were sent; 111 libraries replied of which 6 reported no oral history resources (see table 1). Usable replies, therefore, were received from 105 libraries.

TABLE 1
ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

Libraries				*Starting Dates (A=still active)*			
Queried	*Replied*			*Pre-1970*	*1970-1976*	*Post-1977*	*(?)*
7	4 -1 =	3	Alabama	0	1(1A)	2(1A)	0
31	22 -1 =	21	California	5(2A)	10(2A)	2	4
14	8 -1 =	7	Connecticut	0	2(1A)	4(3A)	1
7	5 =	5	Florida	1(1A)	1	3	0
8	3 -1 =	2	Georgia	0	1(1A)	1	0
5	3 =	3	Idaho	0	1(1A)	2(2A)	0
35	13 -1 =	12	Illinois	1	10(5A)	1(1A)	0
25	21 =	21	Indiana	2(2A)	11(3A)	7(2A)	1
16	7 =	7	Iowa	0	2(2A)	4(1A)	1
7	5 =	5	Kansas	0	2	2(1A)	1
27	20 -1 =	19	New York	4	10(2A)	2(1A)	3(1A)
Total							
182	111 -6[a] =	105[b]		13(5A)	51(18A)	30(12A)	11(1A)

[a]=libraries reporting no oral history resources
[b]=total libraries analyzed
(?)=dates not given

Only 36 projects (34%) were currently active. (Projects were classified as inactive if responses labeled them as such, or if they had not added an interview since 1979.) Projects ranged in size from 1 to 500 interviews. The median number of interviews was 20. The number of transcribed interviews ranged from 0 to 500. The median number of transcriptions was two. Of the 105 projects, 13 started before 1970 (5 were still active); 51 started between 1970 and 1976 (18 were still active); 30 started in 1977 or later (12 were still active); and 11 did not identify beginning dates (1 still active). The largest number of projects were found in:

Illinois	(35 queried; 13 replied);
California	(31 queried; 22 replied);
New York	(27 queried; 20 replied);
Indiana	(25 queried; 21 replied).

This is not surprising since these are among the most populous states and they have often been in the forefront of library innovation. A comparison of the states shows some interesting differences, however. California and New York had a number of projects that started in the 1960s but few that started after 1976. Approximately 20% of their projects remain active. Indiana in comparison had a substantial portion of projects starting after

1976, and one-third of its projects remain active. Illinois had fewer post-1976 projects, but half of its projects remain active.

A majority of the projects in other states started after 1976, and nearly half of their projects remain active. A state-by-state breakdown of active projects is as follows:

Indiana	7 (2 post-1976)	Idaho	3 (2 post-1976)
Illinois	6 (1 post-1976)	Alabama	2 (1 post-1976)
California	4 (0 post-1976)	Florida	1 (0 post-1976)
New York	4 (1 post-1976)	Kansas	1 (1 post-1976)
Connecticut	4 (3 post-1976)	Georgia	1 (0 post-1976)
Iowa	3 (1 post-1976)		

The raw data become meaningful when the situation in individual states is examined more closely and put into context. The state-by-state analysis that follows provides a cumulative justification for the conclusions presented at the end of this paper.

California

In the sixties, much oral history activity was centered in California. Oral history programs began in 1954 at the University of California, Berkeley, and in 1959 at the Los Angeles campus. Allan Nevins, retired from Columbia, was working at the Huntington Library near Los Angeles in the mid-1960s. With his encouragement the Oral History Association was established during a conference at Lake Arrowhead in 1966.

Projects proliferated. Enthusiasm for oral history became so great that by 1970 the State Library announced plans for a "California Bibliographic Center for Oral History" to collect and disseminate information about projects.

Libraries were enthusiastic too, inspired by Willa Baum, who was the director of the Regional Oral History Project at Berkeley, and author of the standard guide to oral history technique, *Oral History For the Local Historical Society*. She was an early and articulate advocate of library involvement with oral history. She promoted the idea in presentations before library groups and in articles published in the *California Librarian*.

This survey identified 15 library projects that started before 1977. California libraries, however, were especially hard hit by funding cutbacks in the late 1970s. The passage of Proposition 13 prompted many austerities. Not surprisingly, most of the oral history projects were phased out by 1980, and

only two new projects started after 1976—both funded by grants. In the words of the respondent from Richmond Public Library: "The project was not given the status of a regular task, hence it got what time could be scraped up. When the budget crisis hit, it was one of the first programs to be dropped."

Pre-1970 Projects

Active

—Salinas Public Library (1967+)—"The Steinbeck and Steinbeck Country Oral History Project" has collected over 100 interviews with persons who knew Steinbeck or knew about the historical background of people, places or events described in his works. (The response did not make it clear whether any have been transcribed.) In conjunction with the interviews, historic photographs have been collected, and hundreds of original photographs of people and places have been taken. These resources are added to the library's prestigious John Steinbeck Archives. The project has operated with a small, dedicated corps of volunteers who either knew Steinbeck or are deeply interested in his works and the Salinas Valley.

—Mill Valley Public Library (1968+)—An oral history project, cosponsored by the Friends of the Library and the Mill Valley Historical Society and administered by an Oral History Committee, has collected 250 interviews and transcribed 225 of these. Committee members and other volunteers have interviewed and transcribed. The library catalogs, indexes, and provides access to resources thus produced.

Inactive

-Pomona Public Library (1963)—The library merely accepted and stored 125 tapes (none transcribed) collected by a Claremont College graduate student.

—Merced County Library (1968-80)—Over a 13 year period, two volunteers randomly collected 11 interviews with long-time residents and transcribed nine of these.

—Anaheim Public Library (1969-70)—The curator of the local history room collected 12 interviews (none transcribed).

1970-76 Projects

Active

The two most prolific of the ten projects identified as starting during this period, remain active:

—Marin County Free Library (1973+)—Two volunteers have conducted 250 interviews; a third volunteer has transcribed 158.

—Upland Public Library (1974+)—With funding from the Friends of the Library, library staff have conducted 125 interviews. Transcription and indexing are progressing slowly due to lack of staff time. To date, 20 interviews have been transcribed.

Inactive

The eight inactive projects tended to be small, to have extended over a period of years before languishing, and to have been modestly funded by the library, or—in a few cases—by Friends of the Library. Interviews were conducted either by volunteers or by library staff. Both arrangements offered some problems. Some libraries reported difficulty in obtaining and retaining volunteers who had the background, skills and commitment to pursue the project. In some cases, volunteers were difficult to supervise; in other cases, they operated without any direct library supervision. Using staff to conduct and transcribe interviews, or even just to supervise volunteers, offered some benefits, but required a commitment of staff time difficult to maintain in the face of increasing demands for library service and diminishing resources.

Post 1976 Projects

Inactive

—Tulare County Public Library (1979)—With an LSCA grant, a resident of the Tulare River Reservation was hired to conduct interviews that would preserve native American history and lore. Nine interviews were conducted. Transcripts for seven were completed by a librarian and a CETA worker.

—San Joaquin Valley Library System (1979-80)—With a large grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the System conducted the enormously successful "San Joaquin Valley Japanese-American Project." It employed a paid coordinator. As part of this multi-faceted project, fourteen community volunteers were trained in oral history techniques. They collected, and, with the help of a paid typist, transcribed 120 interviews. Transcripts were published by the library. Oral history materials also provided the basis for a videotape and a slide tape.

Successful Projects

Two of the 21 California projects (Salinas and San Joaquin Valley) were rated by respondents "an unqualified success"; 10 were rated "a qualified

success"; and 9 were rated "less than successful." As can be seen in table 2, California respondents offered the highest number of negative evaluations of any state.

TABLE 2
SUCCESS OF ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

	RESPONDENTS RATINGS				
State	*Total Projects*	*Unqualified Success*	*Qualified Success*	*Less Than Successful*	*No Answer*
Alabama	3	1	2	-	-
California	21	2	10	9	-
Connecticut	7	1	5	1	-
Florida	5	1	2	1	1
Georgia	2	-	2	-	-
Idaho	3	1	2	-	-
Illinois	12	3	6	2	1
Indiana	21	6	10	5	-
Iowa	7	1	4	-	2
Kansas	5	1	3	1	-
New York	19	2	12	3	2
Total	105	19	58	22	6

Eleven projects including five "less than successful" ones reported few interviews had been transcribed. Transcriptions tended to be done by volunteers, or less frequently, by library staff. One library that hired a typist to transcribe tapes reported they contained many errors due to the poor audio quality of some recordings and to the transcriber's unfamiliarity with local names.

The Salinas Public Library ("John Steinbeck") and the San Joaquin Valley Library System ("Japanese-American") projects were the ones rated "an unqualified success." Both projects were sharply focused on specific themes and used interviewers with special backgrounds and/or training. The Salinas project's primary aim was to create resources for scholars and researchers—resources that enrich the library's renowned Steinbeck archives. The San Joaquin Valley's aim, on the other hand, was not merely to create resources for scholars, but to widely disseminate information about the Japanese-American community's heritage and to have a perceivable impact on the community. To this end, the project published the edited transcripts in three volumes, and used the oral history materials and photographic resources that had also been collected to create a 39-minute videotape *(Success Through Perseverance)* and a slide-tape *(Improving*

Library Service to Japanese-Americans in the Valley) that have been widely viewed.

Projects characterized by respondents as "a qualified success" were considered to have preserved valuable information for future generations, and—to a much lesser extent—for present-day users. Projects rated "a qualified success," or "less than successful" tended to cite the following failings:

—low use of materials produced;
—lack of staff, funds, time to conduct, supervise, continue projects;
—difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified volunteers;
—lack of planning; projects developed without focus, direction, a schedule, continuity; persons interviewed were selected at random;
—poor quality of interviews; interviewers were untrained and/or lacked background; interviewers lacked control; interviewers were unfocused, rambling;
—resources produced by the project remain inaccessible-untranscribed or incompletely transcribed; not cataloged or indexed; not available for circulation; not publicized to the public;
—poor audio quality on tapes; poor quality of transcripts (inaccuracies and typing errors);
—inability to gain or sustain community interest; and
—project based on false premises about the availability of the desired information from the population interviewed.

From these factors and from the successful characteristics of projects may be extrapolated elements contributing to success:

—preplanning; careful, systematic delineation of goals, strategies, timing; preliminary research into the persons to be interviewed and the subjects to be discussed and into proper oral history methodology;
—involvement of the community; adequate publicity;
—a qualified individual or core group of individuals with the time, skills, dedication to oversee the project;
—adequate staff and funding;
—skilled and committed interviewers; persons with background, training, motivation;
—adequate equipment and technical knowledge to produce good quality recordings; good quality blank tapes used;
—skilled transcribers; verified transcripts produced soon after recording sessions;
—processing of the resources produced—cataloging, indexing, transcribing, illustration with photographic materials collected concurrently with the interviews;
—publicizing the availability of resources produced; and
—creation of print or audiovisual by-products that can more easily reach a

broad cross-section of the community: books, booklets, audiovisual productions that can be freely and widely disseminated and that are attractive and meaningful to the average person.

Most of the California projects, being poorly funded, could achieve only some of these characteristics. The well-funded San Joaquin Valley project, however, was able to display all these characteristics. It was well-planned; well-supervised; made heavy use of radio, television, newspaper publicity; reached a broad cross section of the public with newspaper articles, publications, and media productions; and had an immediate and powerful impact on the community. Important information that would have been lost, due to the rapid decline in the number of surviving first and second generation Japanese-Americans and to the loss of family and historical records during World War II, was preserved. Local interest in ethnic heritages and their preservation was stimulated. The project also yielded tremendous public relations benefits for the library and resulted in greatly increased rapport with, and utilization of the library by, the Japanese-American community.

Indiana

The Field Agent for the Indiana State Library's Indiana Division, F. Gerald Handfield, Jr., wrote on his response to the questionnaire: "There are approximately 100 oral history projects in Indiana and nearly all owe something to the State Library's, assistance and guidance." State Library Field Agents have been collecting oral history interviews since 1966, and have played a leading role in the establishment of the Indiana Oral History Roundtable in 1971. When Handfield became field agent in 1976, outreach activities increased. He prepared a booklet, *History on Tape*, that offered guidelines for initiating and conducting oral history projects and deposited copies in every public library in the state. Handfield has traveled throughout Indiana offering dozens of speeches and workshops, consulting with organizations planning projects, and advising many on how to seek grants. "By 1979," writes Handfield, "the Indiana Committee for the Humanities was overwhelmed by requests for funding [for] oral history projects."

The 1981 edition of *History on Tape* lists 46 oral history projects that are centered in public libraries. The present survey had identified only 25. It received replies from 21 (including the State Library). There were two pre-1970 projects (both still active); eleven 1970-76 projects (three active); seven post-1976 projects (two active); and one inactive project that did not specify dates.

Pre-1970 Projects

Active

—Indiana State Library (1966+)—Field agents have been conducting oral history interviews since 1966. Approximately 300 interviews have been collected. They have been transcribed (16,000 pages) by a full-time typist paid out of LSCA funds. There is growing interest in video oral history and over 60 interviews have been videotaped. Oral history resources have been used for radio programs, slide-tapes, by television and media producers, researchers, and genealogists.

—Hammond Public Library (1968+)—The collection of 100 tapes contains some oral history interviews that were conducted by two Historical Society members, but the bulk consists of recordings of the Historical Society's monthly program—sessions at which speakers and long-time residents reminisce about the community's past. The library has tried to transcribe the tapes, but, due to staff shortages, fewer than 20 transcriptions have been made.

1970-76 Projects

Active

—Wabash-Carnegie Public Library (1970+)—Over the years, a community leader, who is presently the mayor, has conducted most of the 92 interviews collected. Library staff do the transcription (84 have been transcribed).

—Peabody Library (Columbia City) (1975+)—An unspecified number of interviews have been collected (none transcribed) by various community volunteers. The library provides tape recorder and tape. Tapes have been popular with clubs and senior citizens.

—Wells County Library (1976+)—The Genealogy/Adult Services Librarian has collected 21 interviews; 15 have been transcribed by library staff.

Inactive

—South Whitley-Cleveland Public Library (1970-?)—An informal project initiated by the town librarian and carried out with the help of several community volunteers produced 20 interviews (none transcribed).

—Monroe County Public Library (1974)—This successful one year project began with a community workshop on oral history techniques conducted by someone from the State Library. From those attending, 20 volunteer interviewers were recruited. They collected 50 interviews. The library was less able to recruit volunteers to help with transcribing. Library staff

eventually completed the work—transcribing and cataloging all 50 interviews. A comprehensive subject index is now being prepared.
—Noble County Public Library (1975-82)—The librarian, encouraged by the State Library's example, started and conducted this project. She collected 20 interviews (none transcribed).
—Greensburg Public Library (1976-78)—The library serves as a depository for 30 untranscribed interviews collected by high school seniors with funds from the Bicentennial Commission.

The remaining four projects were very small (none produced more than five interviews) and were rated "less than successful" by three. Reasons given for lack of success were: lack of staff, time, funds, and volunteer assistance.

Post 1976 Projects

Active
—Floyd County Public Library (1978+)—Thirty interviews (none transcribed) have been produced by staff and volunteers. Some financial and volunteer support has been provided by the Historical Society.
—Putnam County Public Library (1981+)—A student from the Folklore Institute and Oral History Project at Indiana University spent three months in residence supervising this project. Through the efforts of the resident, a librarian, and several community volunteers, 18 interviews were collected. Volunteers have transcribed five interviews thus far.

Inactive
Three of the five were funded by grants and involved some type of media product or public programming.

—Michigan City Public Library (1977-79)—This large local history project was funded by a CETA Title VI Special Projects Grant. Project staff produced 20 slide-tapes; a videotape; a 16mm film; and a detailed, richly illustrated guide to historic sites in the county. They devoted half of their time to oral history interviews. They recorded 136 interviews and transcribed 70 before the grant ran out. Tapes have been duplicated for circulation and an annotated free catalog has been produced. Several of the more interesting interviews have been published as illustrated pamphlets.
—Madison-Jefferson County Public Library (1979)—With an Indiana Committee for the Humanities Grant, an oral history specialist was hired to interview nine prominent local people. All interviews were videotaped on VHS cassette. They are currently being transcribed and indexed.

—Vigo County Public Library (1980-81)—With an Indiana Committee for the Humanities grant and a local businessman's gift of $1000, the library undertook an oral history project with the Wabash Valley Press Club. Club members conducted 54 interviews and a professional secretary transcribed them. A series of well-publicized and attended public programs were held in conjunction with the project.

The remaining two post-1976 projects were very small. One ("less than successful") was cosponsored by the Historical Society but was discontinued after two interviews due to lack of volunteers. The other involved the recording of one oral history presentation given at a meeting sponsored by the local Kiwanis Club.

Successful Projects

The State Library rated its project "an unqualified success" as did Wabash-Carnegie, Peabody, Bloomington, Floyd County, and Vigo County. Ten libraries rated their project "a qualified success" citing low use, lack of transcripts and/or time-staff-funding constraints. Five libraries rated their projects "less than successful." These were all very small projects that never got off the ground because of the same constraints reported by the other libraries and especially because of an inability to recruit dedicated volunteers.

Many respondents were very enthusiastic about their projects. One encouraged other libraries not to wait for "ideal circumstances," but to "start now...before (the information) is lost forever." Several other respondents echoed these sentiments.

Looking at Indiana and California responses, we see one important difference. Field agents from the Indiana State Library have long actively promoted oral history and provided information, inspiration, training, and, more recently, help in seeking grants. This has probably contributed to the success of projects and to better quality interviews.

On the other hand, in both states, a majority of the projects have been poorly funded and have relied upon regular library staff and/or volunteers for their operation. When persons with competence, enthusiasm and *time* are not available, projects tend to languish. Even "successful" projects find it difficult to provide for rapid transcription and processing of tapes. In both states, some of the most productive projects have been grant supported.

New York

Of the 27 New York libraries queried, 20 replied. One library denied having oral history resources. Of the remaining nineteen, four started oral history projects before 1970 (none active), ten before 1970 and 1976 (two active), two after 1976 (one active), and three did not provide dates (one active).

Pre-1970 Projects

Inactive
All four oral history projects are inactive. Three were rated "less than successful" due to poor quality and/or nontranscription and nonuse.

—Ellenville Public Library and Museum (1959-77)—A staff librarian collected 22 interviews (none transcribed).

—East Hampton Public Library (1967; 1980)—The library has merely cataloged and added to the collection five interviews (untranscribed) collected in 1967 by a high school class. In 1980, an in-depth (ten cassettes and transcription) interview with the town historian was conducted by a professional historian and paid for by the Amagansett Improvement Society.

The remaining two projects were very small, producing under five untranscribed interviews. Both were conducted by staff librarians.

1970-76 Projects

Active
—Jericho Public Library (1973+)—The Local History Librarian has collected 21 interviews. All have been transcribed. At first a student was recruited to transcribe them, but it was found necessary to hire a "professional" to do this work.

—Ossining Public Library (1976+)—The library serves as a depository for copies of 98 (untranscribed) interviews produced by a task force of volunteers working with the Historical Society and the chamber of commerce.

Inactive
—Ogdensburg Public Library (1970-79)—The library director collected 31 (untranscribed) interviews before lack of time forced him to discontinue the project. He commented: "I did what I could, when I could with what I could. We have a very valuable collection...if the library had waited to get

the best equipment and sufficient staff, the project would never have begun."

—Bryant Memorial Library (Roslyn) (1971-75)—Two librarians with an interest in local history collected 50 interviews and transcribed 5.

—Merrick Public Library (1971-79)—As a Bicentennial project, members of the Historical Society conducted 15 interviews. The single transcript was prepared by high school students as a typing class project. The library has cataloged, and houses copies of, the tapes.

—North Merrick Public Library (1971-72)—Under a federal program, a college student was assigned to the library as a summer "cadet." She conducted seven (untranscribed) interviews, collected old photographs, and researched town history at nearby local history collections. She used these materials to write a draft history of the town. This was edited by a member of the Friends of the Library, illustrated with historic and contemporary photographs and drawings by local artists, and published as a booklet, *Yesterday in the Merricks*. The booklet was a great success especially since there had previously been no town history available. The project "was very popular. It made people proud of their hometown."

The remaining four oral history projects were Bicentennial projects conducted by volunteers, Friends of the Library groups, and, in one case, a library trustee. They produced from 5 to 24 interviews. Those with transcriptions have employed the services of library staff, volunteers, and in one case, a CETA worker.

Post 1976 Projects

Active

—Port Washington Public Library (1980+)—Through a series of grants, the library has been able to hire a professional oral historian to conduct and coordinate oral history activities. Twenty interviews have been produced and transcribed. Projects have dealt with the Black community, the Italian community, the sand pit industry, and local characters and heroes. Videotapes, illustrated booklets, and an audiotape walking tour have been produced. Each summer a workshop course is offered that teaches community members to produce videotape oral history documentaries.

Inactive

—Tuckahoe Public Library (1980-81)—The village paid the tuition of a library employee enrolled in an oral history course at a nearby college. She conducted and transcribed 12 interviews.

As part of another study, this writer learned of other post-1976 grant funded projects. Between 1979 and 1982, ten libraries received NEH funds to develop programs on the theme "A Sense of Community—Diversity and Change." At least five conducted some type of oral history project as part of their activities. Some have resulted in slide-tapes, some in videotapes that will be cablecast, and one in a widely distributed booklet containing excerpted reminiscences. Also, in 1982, the Rochester Area Resources Exchange gave a small grant to the Chili and Gates libraries to work with the school system to produce audiotape and videotape oral history resources to support the newly mandated inclusion of local history in the fourth grade curriculum.

Of the three projects that did not identify dates, only the Hicksville Public Library project remains active. The director and another librarian have collected 40 interviews. A college student transcribed four as a summer employee.

Successful Projects

Two libraries (Port Washington and Ogdensburg) rated their projects "an unqualified success." Twelve rated them "a qualified success" citing the same shortcomings noted by the California and Indiana libraries. The three libraries rating projects "less than successful" were all evaluating pre-1970 projects. (There is the possibility that new librarians may view the efforts of their predecessors with more objectivity or perhaps undervalue them.) Two libraries did not provide ratings. Again, there was evidence of increasing grant support and multimedia products in some more recent projects.

Illinois

Illinois had the largest number of public libraries listing "oral history" in the *American Library Directory* of any of the 11 states. However, although 35 libraries were queried, only 13 replied.

As was the case in Indiana, there has been strong leadership and promotion of oral history during the past decade. The Oral History Office at Sangamon State University, which has received several grants from the State Library, was established in 1971 and has been particularly influential. Its basic guide to oral history techniques, *Oral History: From Tape to Type,* was widely distributed in Illinois and has been published by the American

Library Association. The Moraine Valley Oral History Association has promoted oral history projects among its 13 member libraries since 1975.

One of the 13 libraries responding had disbanded its oral history collection. Of the remaining 12, only one inactive project started before 1970. Of the ten that started between 1970 and 1976, five remain active (the one project that started after 1976 also remains active).

Pre-1970 Project

Inactive

—Oak Lawn Public Library (1959-81)—Library personnel and trained volunteers conducted 15 interviews and transcribed 7. Interviewers and the transcriber received their training through the Moraine Valley Oral History Association.

1970-76 Projects

Active

—Franklin Park District (1972+)—The Local History Librarian has collected 12 interviews and transcribed 10.

—Wilmette Public Library (1975+)—Two volunteers have collected 48 interviews. These have been transcribed by paid stenographers (attempts to use volunteers for transcribing proved unsuccessful).

—Bensenville Public Library (1975+)—The Local History Librarian has conducted 52 interviews, and with the help of a typist, has transcribed and edited 49. The project has employed well defined objectives and standardized procedures. The tapes formed the basis for the book, *Bensenville*.

—Morris Public Library (1976+)—The Local History Librarian conducted 30 interviews and has transcribed one. Tapes have been used in radio spots, for slide shows and for student papers.

—Palos Heights Public Library (1976+)—Library staff, trained by the Moraine Valley Oral History Association (MVOHA), have collected 56 interviews. To date, 22 have been transcribed. Tapes are sent to MVOHA for copying, transcription and editing. After patron verification, they return to MVOHA for final typing.

Inactive

—Forest Park Public Library (1974-80)—The Local History Librarian, who is also vice-president of the Historical Society, collected 14 interviews

(none transcribed) before demands on her time forced her to abandon the project.

—Galesburg Public Library (1975-78)—The Special Collections Librarian, library employees, and volunteers collected and transcribed 27 interviews.

—Winfield Public Library (early 1970s)—CETA employees were used in this project. Eight interviews were collected (none transcribed) before funds ran out.

—Centralia Public Library (1975-?)—A librarian and two board members collected 18 interviews (none transcribed).

—Tiskilwa Township Library (1976-79)—In 1976, the Starved Rock Library System used an LSCA grant to encourage oral history projects in member libraries. Four interviews were collected and transcribed.

Post 1976 Projects

Active

—Eisenhower Library District (1979+)—Assisted by grants from several townships and villages, the library has initiated an effort to develop a local history collection that will provide patrons with a comprehensive overview of area history. As part of this effort, the library's "Historical Researcher" has conducted 15 oral history interviews. They are in the process of being transcribed and cataloged.

Another post-1976 project ought to be mentioned. As part of another study this writer learned of an NEH-funded project that was conducted during 1981-82 at Pekin Public Library. The aim was to produce several videotapes dealing with area landmarks. Eight teams of high school students were trained in oral history and video recording. They worked with adult advisors to research the landmarks, interview local people and do the videotaping. At the time of inquiry, tapes were still being edited. They will be loaned by the library and aired on local cable television.

Successful Projects

It will be noted that a majority of the projects cited used regular library staff for their conduct. The comments of those responding tended to express great enthusiasm for the projects and the conviction that valuable resources had been produced. Those calling the projects "a qualified success" cited the constraints on time and funds mentioned earlier as well as incomplete processing and low current use.

Three projects were rated "an unqualified success" (Bensenville, Palos Heights, Forest Park). Six projects were "a qualified success," two were rated "less than successful," and one library did not ofier an evaluation.

The Directory of Illinois Oral History Resources

In 1981, with funding from the State Library, Sangamon State University's Oral History Office compiled a directory of oral history projects in the state. It listed 34 public library oral history collections—only one started before 1970 (Oak Lawn). However, it listed 14 that started after 1976—a marked difference from the responses to the present survey. This illustrates a shortcoming of the present study since it indicates that listings in the *American Library Directory* may give an incomplete picture of oral history activity and be especially incomplete for more recent projects. (It might also be noted that a number of the libraries queried by—and some responding to—the present study are not in the Sangamon Directory, indicating oral history projects in the state are even more widespread than the directory indicates.) When the 20 pre-1977 projects in the directory are compared to the 14 post-1976 projects in the directory, an interesting difference is apparent (see table 3).

TABLE 3
A Comparison of Pre-1977 and Post-1976 Oral History Projects

	Projects	
Conducted Primarily By:	*Pre-1977*	*Post-1976*
Library staff	10	4
Library staff & volunteers	2	3
Volunteers	4	3
Outsiders (deposited)	0	4
? (not indicated)	4	0
Total	20	14

At least half of the pre-1977 projects were conducted primarily by library staff compared to less than one-third of the post-1976 projects. Furthermore, post-1976 staff-directed projects were very small. Three produced one, two and six interviews respectively. The fourth, Eisenhower Library, had some grant support and produced 15 interviews.

In four other post-1976 projects, the library's role was entirely passive with the library merely serving as a repository for resources produced elsewhere. Several post-1976 projects involved grant or CETA funds. Most notable

was the Park Forest Public Library project (1980-81), where an Illinois Humanities Council Grant made it possible to hire a full-time project director. With the assistance of 20 volunteers, 80 interviews were collected, transcribed and edited. The directory listings suggest that interest in oral history is still great in Illinois, but that there has been a decline in the extent of new library projects funded entirely from the regular budget and depending primarily on the efforts of regular library staff.

Other States

Connecticut

Fourteen libraries were queried; seven replied with six providing dates of oral history projects. Many seem to have emulated characteristics of the very successful Greenwich Public Library Project—joint library-historical society sponsorship, reliance on volunteers, and partial dependence on community donations for financial support.

—Greenwich Public Library (1973+)—Started as a Bicentennial project, this has evolved into what is probably the largest and most successful public library related oral history project in the country. Originally sponsored by the library and the Historical Society, it is currently sponsored by the Friends of the Library. All work, except transcribing, is done by volunteers. Transcribing onto cassette costs $30 per hour. Funding has, in the past, included very substantial grants and donations from the community—it is now funded by the Friends. There are over 500 interviews—all transcribed and indexed. Of these, 90 have been edited, illustrated and bound in hardcovers for circulation. Transcripts for 350 interviews are available on microfiche from the Microfilming Corporation of America.

—Thompson Public Library (1976-79)—Funded by an NEH grant and CETA funds, the project used paid interviewers. They produced 150 interviews and transcribed 101 before funds ran out. Excerpts have been used to create a slide-tape, "Thompson: Today and Yesterday."

—Woolcott Library (Litchfield) (1977+)—Inspired by the Greenwich oral history project, the library and the Historical Society developed this ongoing project. Thus far volunteers have produced 65 transcribed interviews with transcripts being professionally typed. The project has depended on tax deductible contributions from the community.

—Farmington Village Library (1978+)—A joint venture of the library and the Historical Society, the project has received its modest financial support from these institutions and from community contributions. Volunteers have conducted most of the 35 interviews (5 transcribed).

—Waterford Public Library (1979+)—Jointly sponsored by the library and the Historical Society and supported by a small grant from a Connecticut foundation, this project has produced about a dozen untranscribed interviews. A reference librarian has been the interviewer.

The library which did not provide dates indicated its inactive project was conducted by the Friends of the Library. Information about the number of interviews and transcripts was also missing. The one respondent that labeled its project "less than successful" was Bridgeport Public Library. The library expended much time and effort on developing a cooperative venture with three area colleges whereby students would enroll for a credit-bearing course and then produce oral histories. Few interviews were ever completed.

Iowa

Most projects have depended on volunteers. The most successful post-1976 project was supported by a grant.

—Musser Public Library (Muscatine) (1970+)—Special Collections Librarians have conducted 120 interviews. Although none have been transcribed, they receive substantial use—partly due to a simple but interest-provoking leaflet that is freely distributed. It describes the tapes and the various topics they cover. The library has an active Home Bound Delivery Program and the tapes are very popular with home bound senior citizens.

—Public Library of Des Moines (1974+)—Volunteers have collected 65 tapes (none transcribed).

—Davenport Public Library (1978)—The library has depository copies of 23 transcripts of interviews conducted by a community college with a NEH Youth Grant.

—Spirit Lake Public Library (1978-79)—A volunteer has collected 11 interviews (none transcribed).

—Corning Public Library (1979+)—A retired man has conducted 25 interviews (none transcribed). The librarian pays for the blank tapes out of his own pocket.

—Rolfe Public Library (1980-81)—With a grant from the Iowa Humanities Board and private donations, the library undertook an oral history of Rolfe with an emphasis on the history of transportation in the region. An oral history specialist was paid to offer a series of three workshops to the general public. Fifteen volunteers collected 110 interviews. A typist has transcribed them. The project was well publicized—especially in a regular newspaper column which is written by the librarian.

Kansas

Two pre-1977 projects, both inactive, included an LSCA-funded project and one in which the library served as a depository for tapes produced by a Bicentennial committee. Two post-1976 projects included a CETA-funded project which was discontinued when the funds ran out, and the only active project which relies on the efforts of the librarian and a volunteer. The fifth project ("less than successful") was from an unspecified year and produced a single untranscribed interview.

—Bellville Public Library (1974-78)—This LSCA-funded project had the dual aims of collecting community history and increasing the elderly's feelings of self-worth. The project, part of the library's services to the aged program, employed the services of a local teacher who conducted 50 interviews on a volunteer basis. Some tapes were transcribed at the university where the teacher was pursuing a graduate degree. The rest of the 47 transcripts were prepared by a hired typist. The tapes circulate well and have been excerpted for use in several slide-tapes.

—Salinas Public Library (1975-76)—Fifty tapes of interviews conducted by Bicentennial Committee members have been deposited in the library. School children have transcribed seven.

—Newton Public Library (1977-81)—CETA PSE funds supported this project which produced 45 interviews including some videotape. Of these, 13 were transcribed before funds ran out. Some video interviews have been cablecast to the community.

—Leavenworth Public Library (1981+)—The city librarian has personally conducted 38 interviews. They have been transcribed by a volunteer who is a retired staff member.

Florida

The one pre-1970 project, a Library-Historical Society effort which involves taping the Society's meetings, is the only project that remains active. One pre-1977 project collected a dozen interviews for a Bicentennial "time capsule" with the aid of a women's club. Post-1976 projects included a CETA project and two small projects—one using staff, and one using staff and volunteers.

—Manatee County Library System (1965+)—A small group of dedicated Historical Society members have collected 150 tapes of oral history presentations and programs at Society meetings. They have transcribed 70 and are preparing a master index. The librarian is an active member of the Society. The library receives copies of tapes and transcripts, catalogs them and makes them available to the public.

—Cooper Memorial Library (Clermont) (1976)—The library assisted the Clermont Women's Club in collecting 12 (untranscribed) interviews for deposit in a Bicentennial "time capsule." The library has retained copies.

—Largo Library (1977-78)—CETA workers collected 32 interviews (untranscribed). The project was discontinued when funds ran out.

—Captiva Memorial Library (1977-82)—The librarian and four volunteers collected 15 interviews. A volunteer has transcribed four.

—Gainesville Public Library (1977-78)—Library staff collected nine interviews and transcribed three before increasing demands on staff time made it necessary to discontinue the project.

Idaho

Idaho libraries are members of the Southwestern Library Association—a group that has been actively promoting library oral history and the use of an "Oral History Committee" approach to ensure proper planning and community involvement. All three Idaho projects remain active and are considered successful. They also have all benefited from grants and/or donations for their funding.

—Caldwell Public Library (1973+)—An Oral History Committee of community volunteers has collected 75 interviews. Library staff have transcribed ten. Tapes have been used to prepare nine slide-tape programs which are very popular with organizations, clubs and schools. A photographer is an active member of the committee. The project has been funded through a variety of grants and private donations.

—Salmon Public Library (1978+)—An Oral History Committee, which is funded by donations, has collected 35 interviews (three transcribed). The library catalogs and stores the tapes.

—Midvale Community Library (1979+)—The project was started with a small SWLA grant. Volunteers have collected three interviews (none transcribed). They are much used by school children, genealogists and local history buffs. The main problem is finding dedicated volunteers; the staff lacks the time to do interviews.

Alabama

Three projects, of which two remain active, include one which uses library staff (eight interviews/four transcribed), one which has used CETA workers and community volunteers (190 interviews/none transcribed), and an inactive project (34 interviews/34 transcribed) that was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

—Mobile Public Library (1974+)—CETA workers and community volunteers have collected 190 interviews (none transcribed).

—Millbrook Public Library (1978+)—Staff have collected eight interviews and transcribed four. Staff shortages have made progress slow and materials have not yet been publicized or made available to the public.

—Birmingham Public Library (1979-81)—With a substantial NEH grant, a project coordinator was hired to conduct and, with clerical assistance, transcribe 34 interviews with residents of Gee's Bend, a small all Black community. The aim was to preserve rapidly disappearing customs, lifestyles and folkways. The project was sponsored by the library's Southern Women's Archives.

Georgia

While eight libraries were queried, only three replied. One of these denied having an oral history collection. The remaining two included a library which owned interview tapes produced by a local radio announcer, and a library which has depended on library staff and a CETA worker to collect and transcribe interviews.

—Augusta Public Library (1974+)—Funded by the Friends of the Library, the project has been conducted by staff and, for a two and a half year period, by a CETA worker. An unstated number of tapes have been produced of which 31 have been transcribed. Staff shortages have delayed completion of the project.

—Okefenokee Regional Library (1977)—The library owns 10 tapes (none transcribed) of oral history interviews collected by a local radio announcer.

Successful Projects

Thirty-two projects were identified in the states of Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, and Kansas; fourteen remain active. A majority depended on volunteer assistance; quite a few benefited from special grants or CETA workers. Unless specially funded, projects tended to have few transcripts. Some of the more successful projects have actively promoted resources and/or used them for media productions. Several mentioned increasing demands on staff time that have forced them to curtail or delay completion of oral history projects, while most respondents were enthusiastic about the projects, they tended to cite the same problems mentioned by respondents in other states—lack of time and workers, low funding, little use of materials, and/or inability to provide for complete or rapid transcription of raw tapes. Six projects were described as "an unqualified success," twenty were "a qualified success, three were "less than successful," and three libraries did not offer evaluations.

Transcription Problems

Of the 105 libraries that were analyzed; 43 had transcribed none of their oral history tapes; 14 had transcribed fewer than 25% of their tapes; 15 had transcribed between 26% and 69% of their tapes; and 29 had transcribed 70% or more of their tapes (4 did not provide this information). Therefore, more than half of the libraries had transcribed fewer than 25% of their oral history tapes. Many respondents acknowledged this to be a major problem.

Even projects that were able to find volunteers for interviewing tended to have difficulty finding volunteers for transcribing, and several projects that started using volunteers for transcribing found the arrangement to be less than satisfactory.

Many times transcripts, when prepared at all, were prepared very tardily—as much as a decade later. This probably precluded verification of the transcripts by the persons interviewed. It must be noted that transcribing is a difficult process and errors are likely to be made—especially when transcribers are amateurs. The difficulty is compounded when poor sound quality (a frequent complaint) distorts or renders inaudible the words of the speaker.

Some respondents stated that collecting tapes for posterity should be the primary concern of oral history projects and that transcription should be a secondary consideration. Unfortunately, audiotape—especially thin cassette tape—is not an archival medium. Some longevity may be predicted for high quality reel-to-reel tape stored under proper conditions, but the longevity of cassette tapes—especially poor quality cassette tapes (a number of libraries specifically mentioned they regretted poor quality tapes had been used) kept under poor storage conditions (certainly the case in many libraries)—cannot be relied upon.

Utilization

Asked to characterize current utilization of oral history resources, of the 105 libraries, 88 reported "modest use"; 15 reported "substantial use"; none reported "heavy use"; and 2 did not answer. Many libraries attributed low use, which was frequently cited as a shortcoming, to another shortcoming—lack of transcripts. A number of libraries predicted more use when processing was complete. There is some justification for this since 10 of the 15 libraries reporting "substantial use" had transcribed more than 70% of their interviews. Still, 19 other libraries that had 70% of their interviews transcribed reported "modest use," suggesting transcription per se does not guarantee materials will be used.

On the other hand, only 4 libraries out of the 57 with under 25% of their tapes transcribed reported "substantial use." These included Thompson (Idaho) which has used the tapes to produce slide-tapes, and Muscatine (Iowa) which has employed simple but effective promotional techniques and which has found tapes to be very popular with home bound senior citizens. Columbia City (Indiana) reported substantial use of tapes by clubs and by senior citizen groups.

Libraries reporting modest use tended to indicate users were: students, genealogists, scholars, and local history buffs. Some materials were used to produce books, pamphlets, exhibitions, slide-tapes, videotapes, and 16mm films, as well as for reference service, in classrooms, and for radio spots. Use of transcripts for reference service was greatly facilitated when a general index had been prepared.

Comments and Advice

Questionnaires asked respondents for comments and to offer advice to librarians considering similar projects. The following are representative of their replies.

Comments on the Value of Projects and Problems Encountered
"It was difficult to keep volunteers going and they produced interviews of mixed quality."
"There was no continuity or plan and not enough publicity to promote public interest. Finding time for transcribing was difficult."
"Because of limited staff, we have not been able to devote the necessary time, and we have found it difficult to recruit the kind of volunteers needed for a professional approach."
"Project was discontinued due to lack of staff and time. Never transcribed. Seldom used."
"We are saving the past for future generations."

Using edited oral history tapes, slide shows were produced.

These were subsequently copied onto videocassette, which resulted in increased use. "The usefulness of the finished product speaks for itself. They appeal to children and adults, support classroom study of local history, bring history room materials to more patrons, develop a spirit of community, emphasize the importance of local history collections, and are used with tour groups."
"Unfortunately, the community has not taken advantage of these resources as anticipated."

"Tapes have been transcribed. They are cataloged and indexed and are available in the library to researchers, journalists, public officials, and anyone who wishes to consult them. Interest in local history was stimulated. Public programs related to the project were well attended and well received. Everyone associated with the project left with a desire to learn more about local history and with a stronger sense of place and community."

"This is the only collection of its type in the county. It is frustrating to have made such an excellent beginning and have to quit for lack of funds."

"Interviews were professionally done and based on research."

"The project has touched a responsive chord in a community hitherto uninvolved in recapturing their past."

"Because of limited funding and untrained persons handling the interviews, they are less than effective. Interviewees ramble and wander from the topic. Interviewers have not enough knowledge of the topics to ask probing questions."

"Instant use is unrealistic. As the years go by, the collection will become more valuable."

"Seldom used."

"Large numbers of elementary school students have heard the tapes and learned things about the village that would otherwise be unavailable."

"The project is the basis for much of our local history information. It has stimulated interest in the town's past and its preservation. It provided information where none existed and encouraged people to value their community and its history."

"Uncertain as to the value of the material collected."

"Such a time-consuming project requires outside help which is sometimes difficult to obtain."

"It was time consuming, but once these people are dead, your history is gone."

"Although we have had a few volunteers, we have not been able to come up with a person or persons who is so vitally interested and has the time to persist."

"Transcriptions contain many inaccuracies."

"Early interviews were recorded on cheap cassettes. Many have been badly stored from the beginning, and some have chickens, wind, typewriters, dogs, and airplanes adding to the distortion.

Advice

"Have a plan and a written policy indicating criteria for selecting persons to interview. Commit some library staff and funds. Do not depend com-

pletely on a volunteer operation."
"Use volunteers. Inspire and supervise them. Photograph interviewees."
"Have a release form that enables the library to use the interviews in any way. Use a very good recorder. Try to index the transcriptions."
"We found making outlines of town history useful. Sometimes when interviewing 'old timers,' just the mention of a familiar name or place would set their minds going."
"Try to get a grant."
"Interviewers should be qualified and interested because they determine the quality of the interviews. Transcriber must be a skilled typist with a trained ear. Buy *good* tapes. Have someone available to confirm spelling of names and places. Most interviewees cannot provide that information, or often they are inaccurate."
"Approach an organized group for help, funding, enthusiasm. Try to interest a club or a local teacher in organizing a project. It might be unprofessional, but something is better than nothing."
"Try to get an expert to help you. Count on some defection in the ranks of volunteers."
"Provide for adequate storage."
"Make sure that professional oral historians are employed as consultants to oversee projects from start to finish. Include transcription and indexing. Find out what other libraries are doing."
"Develop programs, slide shows, a product—something to show the community what has been produced."
"It's really great to get persons on tape,...but they are virtually useless unless transcribed or duplicated for circulation."
"If you do not have the personnel and budget to do an oral history project adequately, do not do it at all."
"Just buy a decent tape recorder, practice a little with the machine and go ahead and have fun. Get some of your oldest residents. Some who can't remember what they had for breakfast will remember what they did 70 years ago. Don't restrict yourself to well-known people. Future generations will be interested in the reminiscences of housewives and children."
"Fully explore all facets of such a program before starting. Develop definite goals and objectives and a systematic approach to interviewing."
"Volunteer effort is difficult to sustain. Seek a grant for paid interviewers."
"Put the project under a staff member and give this person time to pursue it and enlist volunteer support. Give participants some kind of recognition and awards."
"Develop oral history skills and, at the same time, a model for products that will help people capture eras of town history—an illustrated book, films or videotapes."

"Find a rugged leader. Start small. Use Baum as a guide. Do oldsters first—before they die. Get releases. Index."
"When you collect photographs, keep accurate accession slips and write down as much information as possible."
"Start out visiting casually with the interviewee and learn what makes him unique. Make a list of a few key questions to ask and then turn on the tape recorder. Use a clipboard, noting spellings and new questions to be asked."
"Be aware that tapes—and especially transcriptions—are expensive."
"Do not do any project just because it is fashionable."
"Do it. We have not used expensive, sophisticated equipment so we know it can be done. As untrained amateurs, we have had a marvelous time. It is gratifying to know we have kept alive the thoughts and memories of delightful people."
"Don't try to do it alone. Get cooperation from local historians, historical societies and those who know the area and the people and who may have more time to get out and do the legwork and followup."

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present study collected data on oral history resources from 105 public libraries in 11 states. Responses appear to support the following conclusions:

—Projects have varied greatly in size, design, funding, and the nature of the library's involvement.

—The nature of the library's involvement has ranged from passive depository to total responsibility for inception and execution of the project.

—The number of projects in an area as well as the manner of their conduct is often influenced by the activities of agencies (such as the Indiana State Library and the Oral History Office of Sangamon State University in Illinois) which have actively promoted oral history to libraries and provided guidance and training as well as inspiration.

—Public libraries are experiencing increased demands for their services combined with declining levels of funding and staffing. As a result, there appears to be a trend toward greater reliance on volunteers and special grants for the conduct and support of oral history projects.

—Interviews have usually been conducted either by library staff, by volunteers or by a combination of staff and volunteers. A few have used paid interviewers.

—A majority of projects have been small and poorly funded. Many have employed inexperienced and untrained interviewers. In most libraries, oral history materials receive only modest current use. This is partly due

to the fact that, in most libraries, tapes are untranscribed or incompletely transcribed and that relatively few libraries have used the raw materials of oral history to create products that are accessible, meaningful and of interest to the general public.

—The value of oral history projects as resources for future generations is undermined in many cases by the fact that so many tapes are untranscribed, unindexed, of poor technical quality, and/or improperly stored. Even under good storage conditions, magnetic tape is not an archival storage medium. In addition, the intrinsic value of the interviews is dependent on the skill of the interviewers and on how well subjects have been selected.

—There have also been well-funded projects. Projects that have collected a substantial number of interviews, projects that have used trained persons to collect interviews, that have transcribed interviews, and that have reprocessed the oral history resources in ways and into products which make them useful resources for present and future researchers and/or that enable them to have an immediate and positive impact on the general community. The production of illustrated publications and audiovisual programs has been a major factor in disseminating oral history to the community at large. The collection of visual materials as well as recorded interviews has helped make oral history projects more valuable for researchers and easier to use with the general population.

—Some of the most successful projects have been funded with government grants. The success is attributable, not only to the funds provided, but to the funding agency's insistence on clear objectives, well planned strategies, the involvement of humanities scholars, and the inclusion of programming for the public as part of the project.

—Most libraries consider their projects worthwhile, but only partially successful. Factors most often cited as hindering success include: inadequate staffing and funds, uncertain quality of materials collected, difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteer assistance, low current utilization, and the lack of transcripts. Still, most libraries feel their projects have saved information that would otherwise have been lost forever and have created valuable resources for future generations.

Are public library oral history projects truly worthwhile? Generally speaking, yes; oral history projects are worthwhile. How worthwhile is the question that must be asked. Even if only the persons involved with the projects have benefited through participating in this absorbing, enlightening experience, the projects have worth. Ideally, however, projects will have both transient and permanent value and benefit a large segment of the community. Most projects do not reach their full potential. One reason is

indeed the lack of funds, staff and other resources that plague most projects. Another is the lack of knowledge that causes many projects to be undertaken without clear or realistic objectives, with inadequate expertise, without adequate provision for making the resources created actually useful—i.e., accessible and meaningful to the general public and in a form that will remain available and valuable to future generations.

The state councils on the humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities are to be commended for the model projects they have funded. They need to continue this kind of support. They should also be encouraged to address the needs of smaller independent projects. They should sponsor workshops and the production of resources that will educate libraries, historical societies and similar community groups on how to undertake oral history projects and how to make the results of their projects available and useful to present and future generations. Such workshops should include:

1. How to organize and manage an oral history project. Special consideration should be given to options for staffing, funding and cooperation with other community groups, and in formulating realistic objectives.
2. How to conduct effective oral history interviews and how to collect other materials—e.g., photographs—that will enhance the value of the interviews. This includes equipment to be used.
3. How to make oral history materials accessible and useful to the community via programs and products such as illustrated books and audiovisual productions.
4. How to preserve oral history materials for future generations.

Such endeavors would help raise the quality of oral history projects and resources and lead to much greater and more effective utilization of their products.

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VITA

Joseph W. Palmer is an Associate Professor at the School of Information and Library Studies, State University of New York at Buffalo. His M.L.S. is from Pratt Institute. His Ph.D. in Library Science was earned at the University of Southern California.

Concurrent with the present study, Dr. Palmer engaged in a related project—an investigation of how public libraries have used audiovisual media to create and/or disseminate local history information. Interested readers will find the results of that study in the Fall 1983 and Summer 1984 issue of *Public Library Quarterly*.

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